

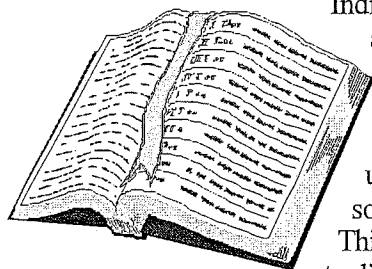
The Electronic Passport to Western Religions

About half of the people of the world practice Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. They are found on every continent, but tend to be concentrated in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Western Asia and North Africa. Christianity and Islam are growing influences in sub-Saharan Africa, often replacing indigenous faiths.

There is one point in the world where you can see the division between western and eastern faiths: the partition that separates Pakistan from India. The two nations were considered one until 1948 when both gained independence from Great Britain. As Pakistan became a Muslim homeland and India a Hindu nation; many Muslim and Hindu families who had lived together for hundreds of years were forced to leave their homes. Religious minorities still exist in both nations, but the line separating India and Pakistan is a clear division between western and eastern thought.

Eastern religions are the faiths practiced primarily east of the partition that separates Pakistan from India. While Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are centered on one God, believers of the eastern faiths seek to find enlightenment by looking within themselves. Hinduism and Buddhism are popular faiths in India and Southeast Asia. Since becoming a communist nation in 1949, China has discouraged religion. Many Chinese practice the teachings of Confucius, which is a political movement rather than a religious faith. Taoism is another philosophy centered in China. Shinto is the religious faith of most Japanese people.

Indigenous religions continue to be popular around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.



Indigenous faiths tend to be animistic. Animism is the belief that natural objects, natural phenomena, and the universe itself possess souls or consciousness. This is also similar to the traditional beliefs of Native

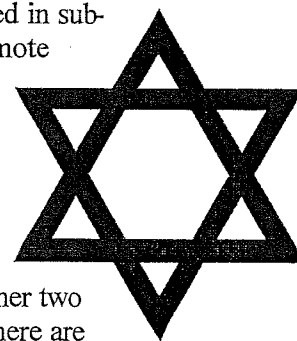
Americans in North and South America.

There are many other religious faiths practiced throughout the world, but a student can generalize those faiths into three groups. The nations west of the Indian

partition generally practice the monotheistic religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The philosophies of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto, and Confucianism are observed east of that partition. Indigenous faiths are practiced in sub-Saharan Africa and other remote parts of the world.

Judaism

Judaism is the oldest religion of the western world and has influenced Christianity and Islam, the other two great monotheistic faiths. There are approximately fourteen million Jews throughout the world.



The Hebrews were the ancestors of the Jewish people and trace their ancestry to Abraham, who left his home

in the Mesopotamian city of Ur about 2200BC. They were different from other religions of their time, because they were monotheistic; they believed in only one god. We call that God Yahweh, but we aren't positive of the pronunciation because Hebrew writing did not include vowel sounds. Some people have looked at the same consonant sounds and have concluded that the Hebrews worshipped Jehovah.

Understanding Others

We study different religious faiths in order to understand other people. Many people have strong religious convictions, and it would be impossible to understand them without first understanding their faith.

People are regularly persecuted for their beliefs. In this century as many as six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. Religious conflicts persist in Ireland, the Middle East and in many other parts of the world. By understanding one another, we can hope to develop tolerance and respect for all people.

The Hebrews believed they had a special relationship with their God, and that they were his chosen people. The Torah is the most holy book of Judaism. The Torah is also holy to Christians, who include it in the Old Testament of their Bible. The Talmud is another holy book in Judaism. The Talmud is a collection of the laws and customs of the Jews.

The Hebrews established a nation they called Israel, but left to escape a famine. A famine is a great hunger. The Hebrews wandered through the desert for many years. They lived in Egypt, and at first were treated well, but in time the Egyptians enslaved the Hebrews. According to Hebrew tradition, Yahweh sent ten deadly plagues to Egypt when the Egyptians would not release his Hebrew slaves. When the Hebrews did escape, tradition states that Moses, the leader of the Hebrews, parted the Red Sea for just enough time to allow the Hebrews to pass. Once the Hebrews reached the other side, tradition states that the waters returned and the Egyptian army drowned.

After their escape across the Red Sea 1250BCE, Yahweh revealed Ten Commandments to Moses. Those commandments formed the basis of Mosaic Law and are the model for both Jewish and Christian moral thought. Babylon (a city-state in Mesopotamia) conquered Israel by 586 BCE, enslaving, killing, or exiling the Hebrews and beginning a period known as the Diaspora. The Hebrews were forced to live as minorities in many different lands until the creation of the Jewish nation of Israel in 1948.

Jewish people have been treated terribly throughout history. European Jews were ordered to leave Spain by Ferdinand and Isabela, and faced pogroms, or organized massacres in many nations, particularly in Eastern Europe. In this century, approximately six million Jews were murdered in what we now call the "Holocaust," where the Nazi party in Germany attempted genocide, or the planned killing of a whole group of people because of their religion or nationality.

Jews worship in synagogues led by a rabbi. Rabbi is a Hebrew word that means, "master." Their holiest period is the weekly Shabat, which lasts from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. Other important Jewish holidays include Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur (a Day of Atonement or confession), Simchat Torah (celebrating receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai), Chanukah (a celebration of a military victory) and Passover (a remembrance of the time the Hebrews lived in Egypt).

Most Jews live in the United States (5 million), Israel (4.3 million), and Argentina (1.1 million). Europe was once home to millions of Jewish people, but most of the survivors of the Holocaust emigrated to other nations. Today only 2.4 million Jewish people remain in Europe.

Christianity

Christianity is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, a Jew who lived about 2000 years ago in what we now call Israel. Jesus taught his followers to "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The followers of Jesus called him Christ. Christ is a Greek word that means, "chosen one." They believed he was the son of God. In time they became known as

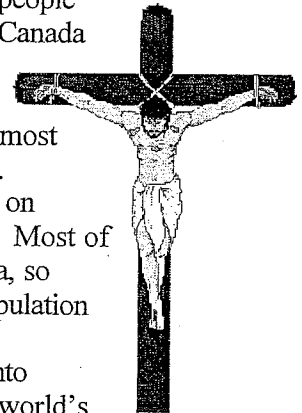
The Star of David

The most recognized symbol of Judaism is the six pointed Star of David. Jewish legend says that David went into battle with the hexagram on his shield. Later, when Jews were minorities in Christian and Muslim nations, they were forced to wear the star on their clothing to identify themselves.

Today you will see the hexagram used to identify synagogues and Jewish organizations. The symbol that was once used to separate Jews from the rest of society is now flown on the flag of Judaism's homeland, Israel.

Christians. The early Christians taught that people's sins would be forgiven if they became Christian. About fifty years after Jesus died, Christians combined the stories of the life and wisdom of Jesus into four books known as Gospels. Gospel means "good news." The holy book of Christianity is known as the Bible and has two parts. The Old Testament consists of the sacred writings of the Jewish people,

and was written mostly in Hebrew long before Jesus. The New Testament of the Bible includes the Gospels, along with essays by Christian writers. The Bible has been translated into more than 1,500 languages and has been read by more people than any other book. Almost two billion Christians live on every continent. They comprise the majority of people living in the United States and Canada (86%), Latin America (92%), Europe (76%) and Australia (85%). Christianity is also the most prevalent faith in Africa (48%). Christianity is a dominant force on every continent but Asia (9%). Most of the world's population is in Asia, so only one-third of the world's population is Christian.



Christianity is divided into many sects. About half of the world's Christian population is Roman Catholic and follows the teachings of Pope John Paul II. Catholic is a Latin word that means "universal," and at one time it was the universal faith of all Christians. Roman refers to the fact that the pope has lived in Rome for over five hundred years. Christians in Eastern Europe broke away from the

Roman Catholics during the Middle Ages to form the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many European leaders, including Martin Luther and John Calvin protested the teachings of the Pope in a period known as the "Reformation." The churches they started became known as Protestant sects. Major Protestant sects in America today are the Baptists (34 million), Methodists (13 million), Lutherans (8

Christians and the Cross

Christians believe that Jesus Christ was both a man and the son of God. They believe God sent Jesus as a messiah, or messenger. The Roman governor of Palestine executed Jesus by nailing him to a cross.

Today the cross is Christianity's most important icon. Most Christians have crosses in and on top of their churches. Some Christians wear a cross as a necklace. The cross symbolizes a Christian's connection with Jesus.

million), Presbyterians (4 million), Episcopalians (2.5 million), and Pentecostals (2.4 million).

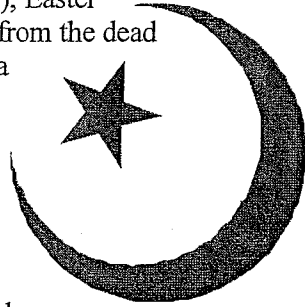
Christians worship in churches led by ministers and priests. Most Christians practice sacraments, or periods of special religious significance. The sacraments include baptism (when a Christian joins the church), confirmation (when a Christian confirms his or her faith), matrimony, and confession. Christian holy days include Christmas (the birth of Jesus), Easter (when Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven), and Lent, a forty-day holy period when many Christians abandon pleasurable habits.

Islam

Islam means "surrender to God" and believers in Islam are called Muslims, or "those who surrender". They worship Allah, an Arabic term that means "the God" (aEl). The Islamic house of worship is a mosque. Unlike Jews and Christians, Muslims do not have a Sabbath, but many Muslims gather in mosques on Friday afternoon for prayers.

Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last of a series of holy prophets that included Abraham, Moses and Jesus. A prophet is a holy messenger. Christians believe that Jesus is God, while Muslims believe Allah is the only the only God and that Muhammad was his messenger.

Muhammad lived about 600 years after Jesus Christ in what we now call Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that Muhammad was visited in a cave by an angel. Muhammad repeated the words of the angel to others who learned them by heart. Eventually, Muhammad's followers collected these messages and gathered them into a book known as the Quran, which in Arabic means "the reading." The Quran¹ is the holy book of Islam. Some Muslims memorize the entire Quran. The Quran has been translated into many languages, but many Muslims believe that the only true version of the Quran is written in Arabic. This is why Arabic spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Often Muslims will learn Arabic as a second language, as a



Jew would learn Hebrew or a Christian would learn Latin.

Muhammad taught that believers should pray five times every day while facing the holy city of Mecca. Faithful Muslims will stop whatever they are doing, and bow down to pray. It is important that surface a Muslims prays on is clean, a Muslim often travel with a prayer rug. The prayer rug usually has some blemish to acknowledge that only Allah is perfect. Muslims must not eat pork or gamble and are expected to give to the poor. Finally, every Muslim is expected to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia if they have the financial resources. A pilgrimage is a long journey to a sacred place as an act of devotion.

Mecca is a holy city to Muslims because it is the site of the Kaaba, a small shrine that Muslims believe to be the most sacred spot on earth. Muslims orient themselves toward the Kaaba during their daily prayers. Every Muslim who makes the pilgrimage to Mecca walks around the Kaaba seven times, during which he kisses or touches the Black Stone. Islamic tradition states that the stone was originally white, but it had become black by absorbing the sins of the millions of pilgrims who have kissed and touched it.

Ramadan is a sacred month to Muslims, and faithful Muslims fast (or do not eat) between dawn and dusk during Ramadan. Muslims use a lunar calendar, so Ramadan falls at different times each year. Ramadan is sacred because it is the month in which the Quran was revealed to Muhammad. Ramadan will begin November 17, 2001.

There are more than one billion Muslims, including five million in the United States. Nations with large Muslim populations include Indonesia (180 million), Pakistan (125 million), Bangladesh (109 million), India (84 million), Iran (66 million), Egypt, Turkey (60 million each), Nigeria (52 million), Algeria, Morocco (29 million each), Ethiopia (24 million), Sudan, Afghanistan (22 million), Iraq

(20 million) and Saudi Arabia (19 million). Russia also has a huge Muslim population, but estimates on its size vary.

Icons of Islam

The crescent, star, and the color green are traditional symbols of Islam. The star represents knowledge and light, and the crescent represents progress. You will find these symbols on the flags of many Muslim nations.

Islamic art includes calligraphy, or decorative penmanship, but no images of people. Muhammad taught that it is wrong to take a picture of a living thing because no one should copy what Allah has made. This is why you will not find a picture of Muhammad in Islamic literature.

¹ The Quran is spelled many different ways because it is written in a different script than English. The generally accepted spelling for the Quran is with a 'Q' to represent the glottal 'K' sound. Some people spell the word *Koran*. You may use either term.

The Ten Commandments

The following is from the Revised Standard Version of the Christian Bible.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

-Exodus 20: 2-17

The Teaching of the Quran

The following translations from the Quran help define Islam for the non-Muslim. Muslims believe that the only true version of the Quran is written in Arabic, and that the word of Allah is lost when translated into another language.

There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger. Muhammad is only a messenger, and many messengers have gone before him.

Pay homage to Allah and be good to your parents and relatives, the orphans and the needy and the neighbors who are your relatives, and the neighbors who are your strangers and the friend by your side, the traveler and your servants.

Give in charity what is good of the things you have earned, and of what you produce; do not choose to give what is bad as donations, that is, things you would not accept yourself.

It is good to give donations openly, but it is better to give to the poor in secret.

Be good to your parents. Look after them with kindness and respect.

Give full measure when you are measuring, and weigh with a balanced scale.

You may dislike something even if it is good for you, but other things that please you may be bad for you.

Allah is with those who preserve themselves from evil and do right.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Shahada – The expression of faith. “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.”

Salat – Muslims pray five times every day—dawn, midday, late afternoon, sunset, and at night. Muslims always face toward the holy city of Mecca.

Zakat – Muslims give a portion of their income to the poor and to public charities.

Sawm – Muslims do not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset during Ramadan. Ramadan is the holy month when the Quran was revealed to Muhammad.

Hajj – If they are in good health and can afford it, Muslims are expected to journey to Mecca once in their lifetime.